

# Implication of Radicalisation for Nigerian Education: A Philosophical Analysis

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## Abstract

The crises rocking the foundations of this world and threatening its existence have assumed a horrifying dimension. This situation is compounded by the increasing drift by young people into radicalized violent extremist militant groups. This paper attempts a conceptual analysis of the term radicalisation, the processes involved in it, its components, as well as the rationale behind the influx of young ones into radicalized violent extremist groups. It also highlights the implications of radicalisation for education in Nigeria, and finally suggests ways to assist in deradicalising the youths.

**Key Words:** radicalisation, extremism, ideologies, Jihadisation, terrorism, indoctrination

## Introduction

In recent times, a worrisome phenomenon which has assumed global dimension has persistently engaged the attention and concern of governments, civil society, security agencies and institutions; a phenomenon which has been described as radicalisation of ideals. This phenomenon has generated wide-spread concern in terms of how to deal with its twin component, i.e., violence. It is evident that the violent aspect of radicalization has greatly decimated populations, maimed innocent citizens and destroyed unquantifiable number of property, thereby retarded the socio-economic and political development of affected nations and regions. Pathetically, the gladiators in the blood-stained theatre are mainly radicalised young people. Since the September 11, 2001 holocaust in New York, radicalization into violent extremism among youngsters has been on the ascendancy, spreading like wild-fire to many parts of the world in different forms and guise. For example, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, etc., they operate under the aegis of Taliban, al-Qaeda; in Somalia, they are known as Shaaba; in Syria and Iraq there is the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), and in Nigeria, we have the Boko Haram (Western education is evil). All these Islamic extremist groups focus on radicalisation of young people with a view to achieving their inordinate ambitions through terrorism.

As a global malaise, concerted efforts are being made to understand the processes involved in radicalisation of ideals among young people by religious and political ideologues. This paper therefore examines the concept of radicalisation, the processes involved and its components. It also highlights the reasons why young people enlist in terrorist groups, as well as the implications of radicalisation for education in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Clarification

The term radicalisation is derived from the word “radical”, which relates to or affects the fundamentals of an ideology, belief system, habits and practices with a view to introducing drastic change or reform in society (The New Webster Dictionary of English Language, (2004). It simply means something proceeding from a root or origin marked by considerable departure from the usual traditional ideals, values, and way of life, which tend to introduce extreme and radical change in the existing doctrines, conditions, or institutions. Therefore, a person who holds extreme views on existing ideals is usually stigmatised as a radical, and branded as anti-government, or anti-society. In some cases, radicals are viewed as non-conformists, who in a way could be regarded as agents of change. The social change they advocate and pursue could be positive or negative, depending on the level of radicalisation process that has taken place in the individuals.

## The Concept of Radicalisation

The term radicalisation seems to be a relatively new concept, which has in the recent past gained unprecedented currency among government officials, media practitioners, scholars, and security agencies, in discourses on terrorism and violent extremism (Onuoha, 2014). He further contends that radicalisation at all levels involves a strong rejection of the status quo by adopting an extreme religious and/or political ideology as well as employing violence as an indispensable means of actualising its ideological goals and objectives. Radicalisation of ideals therefore could be regarded as complete departure from age-long acceptable norms, beliefs and practices within a given system. This may be antithetical to conservatism, which aims at preserving and protecting the ideals of an ideology or system. It is in this connection that radical elements or ideologues latch onto the weaknesses and inadequacies of societal ideals that form a platform for the development of extremist ideals based on grievances,

and subsequent demands for change. In pursuance of their extremist ideals and demands, radicalized individuals resort to terrorism.

Borum (2011), however observes that radicalisation does not equate with terrorism because most people who hold radical ideas do not engage in terrorism, and that even those who lay claim to a “cause” are not deeply ideological and may not “radicalise” in the traditional sense. Similarly, this could be likened to politicians who have been brainwashed to jealously uphold their, political ideals, but who will not engage in neither electoral fraud nor political violence in any form. In this regard therefore, radicalisation may not be necessarily condemned in its entirety unless it adopts extremist ideals, beliefs and objectives, which may become springboards for immitigated violence. It could be argued that radicalisation does not belong to the domains of religion and politics, but also to the intellectual region. Socrates, for instance, was accused among other things, of corrupting the youths with his teachings (Okoh, 2003; Nwafor, 2010). In the present circumstance, he could be said to have radicalized or indoctrinated the youths. In Plato (1999), Socrates was described as, “this villainous misleader of youth”, “corruptor of the youth”, but “the gadfly, which God has given the state”. This no doubt, was intellectual radicalisation without any political or religious underpinning, which caused Athenian leaders of that time a great concern because the youths, who had been radicalized, had begun to question some ethical ideals.

On the other hand, McCauley and Moskaleiko (2008), view radicalisation generally as increased preparation for and commitment to intergroup conflict and violence, which is ostensibly driven by changes in behaviours, beliefs and feelings in directions that increasingly justify ingroup violence, and therefore demand sacrifice in defence of the ingroup. The preparation for and the commitment to radicalisation by individuals involves the totality of their being, time and essence. In other words, their allegiance and loyalty to their avowed cause remain unshakeable, and “as constant as the Northern star”. No wonder, most radicalised youths engage in suicide bombing to advance their cause or to achieve their group objectives. It is evident that radicalisation does not occur in an individual by chance, it takes some time before one gets radicalised, and becomes a hardened violent extremist.

From the above scenario, radicalisation connotes evil that needs to be nipped in the bud without the least consideration. Against this background, van San et al. (2013) observe that by portraying young people with extreme ideals as nothing more than “radicals” we tend to lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with potentially critical citizens who could help shape our democracy. This assertion implies that not all radicalised youths hold violent extremist ideals, rather there could be some among them who would provide society some windows of opportunity to critically re-examine age-long ideals and values cast in conservative mould, which need to be broken in order to keep pace with dynamic forces at work in society in terms of governance as well as the socio-economic wellbeing of all. The issues at stake at this juncture are: what are the processes of being radicalised? Why do youngsters opt for radicalisation?, and what can be done to deradicalise them?

### **Process and Components of Radicalisation**

The processes involved in radicalisation into violent extremism differ from one individual to another, depending on the environment – be it political or religious. The processes of radicalisation and the rationale behind this have elicited researches into what has been described as models of radicalisation. Borum (2014), Silker and Bhatt (2007), and Pretcht (2007), observe that there are four processes of radicalisation into violent extremism. Borum (2014) propounded a four-stage model of terrorist mindset which arises from grievances against perceived injustice attributed to persons, policies or institutions. As a result, the aggrieved persons withdraw themselves with the ulterior motive of demonising the persons or institutions, and therefore feel justified to adopt violence to redress the anomaly. This has a nexus with van San et al. (2013) theory of opponents versus enemies aptly expressed in what Mouffe (2005) calls “a we/they discrimination”, which is not defined in political terms, rather in moral terms. For Silber and Bhatt (2007), their four-stage model of Jihadisation consists of pre-radicalisation, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadisation. There is not much difference between Silber and Bhatt (2007) and Pretcht’s (2007) “typical radicalization pattern”, the four stages are as follows: pre-radicalisation, conversion and identification with radical Islam, indoctrination and increased group bonding, and actual acts of terrorism of planned plots.

In all the three four-stage models above, the pattern of radicalization into violent extremism is quite similar. However, Moghaddam (2007) postulates a six stage model, which he calls – “staircase to terrorism”, made up of six floors. The major difference between the earlier four-stage models and Moghaddam’s six stage model lies in the fourth floor of his staircase to terrorism. Having displayed dissatisfaction with the system, coupled with palpable frustration and aggression towards identified enemy, the radicalizing youths step into the “consolidation of categorical thinking and the perceived legitimacy of the terrorist organisation” level; a stage

where they become greatly sympathetic with extremist ideology and terrorist organisations. Hence, some who finally join a terrorist group actually commit terrorist acts against others whom they consider as enemies because of their “evil” actions or beliefs. It is the total commitment to violence that really distinguishes terrorists from other extremists. From all indications, it is apparent that there is no clearly known uniform stages of radicalisation. Hence, Jenkins (2009) observes that:

... different researchers conceptualise these stages differently and use different terminology to identify or explain them. There is broad agreement, however, that many people who begin this process do not pass through all the stages and become terrorists. Many who become extremists stop short of the violence that is typical of militant jihadists ([www.dhra.mil/persec/osg/terrorism/radicalisation.htm](http://www.dhra.mil/persec/osg/terrorism/radicalisation.htm)).

Although there is no consensus on the sequential order of the process of radicalization, researchers have also identified its components. McCauley and Moskalenko (2008), are of the view that some components of radicalization process have common features with the models discussed earlier. The interacting components are as follows:

- i) Motivations, which consist of “push” factors; e.g., grievances against, or disillusionment with the system, institutions, or policies, and “pull” factors, e.g., money, material gains, personality, etc., which may serve as incentives.
- ii) Sources that facilitate social entry into extremist groups, e.g., the home and kinship bonds, schools, religious institution, and prisons.
- iii) Gradual progression of discrete actions and decisions resulting in one becoming a violent extremist; decisions which take place increasingly with the passage of time.
- iv) Intensification of efforts at increased extremity and commitment serve as springboard for in-group socialization, edged on by group leaders’ influence, which fuel ill-feelings and intolerance against those outside the group.
- v) Ideology, based on a narrative (which gives an ugly picture about something that is wrong, and that some persons or institutions are to blame for it), has always being the fulcrum of violent extremism (Van San et al. 2013).
- vi) Threat by out-group provides the in-group a rallying point as it offers the in-group a key element of the narrative which suggests violence, hence the need for defensive action.
- vii) The identity motive equally plays a major role among radicalising youngsters in search of identity. Generally, people are inclined to hold onto violent extremist ideologies because they feel the need for a sense of belonging.

The processes of radicalization have no uniform approach or pattern as some studies show. First, the NYPD model of Jihadisation stresses individual transformation predicated on the belief that radicalisation is a “bottom-top” process. Second, Pretcht’s model of a “Typical Radicalisation Pattern” has a phase that places more emphasis on “top-bottom” processes of radicalisation. An indisputable phase common to all models of radicalisation is the indoctrination stage in which the extremist ideology is drummed hard into the radicalising youths to ensure consolidation and retention. It could be argued that not every individual radical youth go through all the phases because of their background environment and level of education.

### **Rationale for Recruitment into Radicalisation**

The idea and the thought of becoming an extremist cannot be a flash of the moment’s reaction. It could be argued that the radicalising youth may have given the extremist ideology a considerable thought and time; a period by which sufficient indoctrination may have taken place, and indeed a time by which the young radicals are prepared to step into the final phase of radicalisation process into violent extremism. But before the thought and decision of radicalising, there are likely reasons for toeing the path of extreme violence.

Some researchers have identified some factors responsible for youths joining extremist groups. Onuoha (2014) outlines some causative factors that influence youth recruitment into violent extremist group. First, ignorance of religious teaching opposed to violence makes youth more vulnerable and susceptible to recruitment. In other words, the influence of religious ideologues, and misinterpretation and distorted translation of the Holy Book give added impetus to radicalisation of Islamic youths. In addition, acute unemployment and poverty drive young muslims to radicalisation, coupled with the fact that children with difficult upbringing are easily lured into

radical groups. In essence, the alienation of children from their homes and society provides the cognitive opening that extremist ideologues exploit in the process of radicalisation and recruitment. Furthermore, Onuoha (2014) maintains that there is a strong nexus between high level of illiteracy and youth radicalisation because the radicalising youth lack the ability to critically analyse and question the ideological narratives and doctrines expounded by the religious leaders. Finally he pungently asserts that:

Widespread corruption in Nigeria has not only deprived communities of needed amenities and infrastructure but has created an environment conducive for recruitment and radicalisation. Pervasive malfeasance provides a key referent antiseccular ideology and radicalisation (p.7).

In essence, the lack of social facilities which could engage the youths compel some of them to see government and her agencies as objects of attacks.

In Europe and America, the recruitment process takes a different form and dimension, which is not strictly influenced by the factors examined above. This, no doubt, is as a result of differences in geographical locations, and levels of socio-economic, scientific and technological development. Hence, recruitment into violent extremist groups is much easier, because the various platforms of the social media tend to have replaced the mosques, which hitherto were centres for extremist activities (Neuman and Rogers, 2007). As a result, the influence of radical Imams has been on the decline. In other words, the internet offers access to seekers and home grown militants, thereby making their recruitment into violent extremism hitch-free.

Hegghammer (2006) and Sugeman (2008) observe that most militant recruits, in their different samples, are mainly in their early twenties; most of them from middle class families with secular upbringing, and with high school education. The empirical studies also identified that some of the militant recruits are married with children, and work in unskilled occupations, while few of them had criminal records. But in Nigeria, children below the age of eighteen, especially those without adequate parental guidance, were easily recruited by Boko Haram and paid to spy on security operatives. Onuoha, (2014), recalls an interview he had with young suspects released by the military:

We watched out for the soldiers at their units and reported back to them (Boko Haram). We were reporting when soldiers were at ease or enjoying themselves and when they were off guard and we were paid for doing that (words in bracket mine) (p.6).

He added that these children helped Boko Haram traffic weapons, carry stolen items and hide their guns after attacks. It is clear that recruitment into radicalisation process in the two scenarios radically differ, but they are all bound together by the same ideology and doctrines, which enthrone the use of violence as a means of correcting perceived "evil".

### **Implications of Radicalisation of Nigerian Education**

The problem of religious radicalisation in Nigeria could be traced to the early 1980s – the Maitasine uprising, which claimed so many lives. But since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, religious extremism by an Islamic sect-Boko Haram, has assumed an unprecedented dimension as it declared a holy war against Nigeria. Boko Haram simply means Western education is evil; Western influence is sin, or Westernisation is sacrilege (Wikipedia). In fact, some analysts are of the view that Boko Haram is an extension of the Maitasine (Toni, 2011). Although, the Islamic sect forbids Western influence, but most of them live by and use products and facilities of Western civilization. This is not only the height of contradiction but also dangerous deception and delusion of the worst type. This could be likened to a person who detests cassava, yet he eats garri; bird that left the ground and perched on an anthill is still standing on the ground, or chichi-dodo – the bird that hates excreta but eats its maggots (Armah, 1969).

Radicalisation into violent extremism has some implications for Nigerian education, and this calls for urgent educational reform, which implies the reconstruction and redesigning of social safety nets and addressing new problems that threaten the social fabric of the nation. In other words, educational reform places emphasis on value judgement. Hence, reform in this sense is conceived as a transformation of the entire social system from a less satisfactory status of equilibrium (or disequilibrium) to a more satisfactory status of equilibrium (Kalusi, 2007). However, this may sound plausible and easy to attain, but some scholars tend to argue that the feasibility is very much in doubt because, in their view, the fruits of education takes a long time to manifest and impact on the other facets of society, e.g., the political and economic spheres (Cohen in Enoch, 2007). It is in this light that Katz (1975) argues political change must necessarily take place before educational change, i.e., it is

necessary to alter the political control of the educational system before anything meaningful can change within the classroom. Similarly, on the economic plain, government's budgetary allocations do affect the school system in no small measure. Hence, it could be argued that reform in education can take place without remarkably affecting the other factors, whereas the reverse is the case with regard to the other factors.

The above arguments notwithstanding, education as a vehicle for national transformation needs to be reformed in certain areas e.g., curriculum, and pedagogical skills, among others, in order to achieve national educational objectives. Some aspects of educational reform that could help stem the tide of radicalisation into violent extremism are briefly discussed.

**Curriculum Review** – Since the national integrity and security of Nigeria is greatly threatened by the radicalized elements in Boko Haram, there is urgent need to review the curriculum of the entire education system. It has become necessary for a critical assessment or evaluation of the curriculum content at all levels, with a view to jettisoning aspects that do not conform to the present realities. By implication, a national curriculum conference similar to that of 1969 is what the present situation in Nigeria needs; a conference which would comprise stakeholders from all walks of life; Faturuwa applauds thus:

The National conference held in Lagos in September 1969 was a major Landmark in the history of Nigeria and history of education in Africa ... even in Europe, Asia or America ... what was unique in the Nigerian situation was the idea of involving a cross section of people in curriculum reform.

In other words, any curricular reform in the present circumstance requires the active participation of every stratum of the Nigerian society. The emphasis on the curriculum review should engender the inculcation of fair-minded critical thinking, which is essential if we are to target the root of our problems and develop reasonable solutions, since the quality of everything we do is determined by the quality of our thinking (Bourland, 2007).

**Pedagogical Re-orientation:** Educational reform in its entirety cannot be complete, effective and realistic if the methods of teaching are not thoroughly re-assessed and refined. It therefore implies that teachers should be exposed to and equipped with effective pedagogical skills, which would promote independent-mindedness and critical thinking. This is necessary because radicalisation process employs indoctrination, which blinds radicalized elements from rational thinking, and from differentiating between belief and truth, and between reality and fantasy. Indeed, what is required of teachers is to adopt teaching techniques that would respect the integrity and personality of the learners as a free moral agent.

**Peace Education:** Radicalisation into violent extremism in Nigeria and elsewhere makes it necessary to emphasize peace education in order to curb violence, crises and conflicts of any kind. To Nwafor (2012), if peace education is properly designed and developed, it will meet the explosive situations which have been compounded by the challenging security problems and armed conflicts in various parts of Nigeria. The imperative of this cannot be wished away because it is only in a peaceful and congenial climate that education, which could minimize poverty and inequality – the bases of social conflicts – can effectively take place.

**Citizenship Education:** The height of insurgency in Nigeria calls for a serious attention to citizenship education to enable citizens know their rights and duties to themselves and the state. The main focus of citizenship education should be inculcation of the sense and attitude of patriotism and national consciousness. Citizenship education cuts “across many subject areas such as Geography, Law, Economics, Politics, Environmental Studies, Values Education, Religious Studies, Language and Science (Kerr, 1999). In view of its wider scope, citizenship education entails full and active participation of citizens, which is the *raison d’être* for democracy, and as such an indispensable tool for sustainable democracy (Crick 2007). If citizenship education is properly and effectively instilled; the love for one's country will supersede all other personal consideration, vaulting ambitions and parochial interests as opposed to the general good.

**Moral and Values Education:** There is, at this critical moment of national development, a great need for greater emphasis on moral and values education. The youths should be educated on the type of choices and decisions they make as well as the consequences of such choices and decisions. Through the education system, the learner should imbibe a full dose of values re-orientation which would guide him as regards core national values – honesty, right attitude to work, courage, discipline, regard and concern for the interest of others, and national consciousness (Nduka & Iheoma, 1983). These values have been breached and treated as if the violations were the norm, hence re-emphasis on moral and values education at all levels has become inevitable (Nwafor, 2011). The implications of radicalisation for education in Nigeria so far identified need to be tackled head-long by all stakeholders in the education industry to avoid a replication of what is happening in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, etc., in Nigeria.



**Disruption of Girl-Child Education:** The most serious implication of radicalisation into violent extremism for Nigerian education is that it has disrupted the rising tide of women/girl-child education in the country, especially in the North. Since Boko Haram insurgents abducted over 200 girls at Government Secondary School, Chibok on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2014 the desire and enthusiasm for girl-child education have gradually declined. This therefore would widen the already existing yawning gap of educational inequality between genders, which by extension could have negative impact on the overall development of the country. For this reason, all efforts should be intensified to eliminate permanently every vestiges of insurgency in Nigeria in order to rekindle the dwindling zeal and passion for formal education that liberates and makes an individual functional and useful to himself/herself and the society.

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, radicalisation into violent extremism is an ill wind that blows no nation any good. At heart of any radical ideal is the picture of aggrieved and disillusioned group of individuals, who apportion blames and criticisms on government, policies, institutions, or belief systems, and therefore are hell-bent on effecting change by any means foul or fair. To this end violence becomes the last resort. The radicalisation process is not stereotyped, but the ultimate results are heavily consequential and disastrous as it destroys monumental infrastructural facilities acquired over many decades, causing untimely deaths and leaving many maimed for life. For these reasons, it is imperative for education as a vehicle for social transformation to rise to these challenges with a view to deradicalising extremist groups, and thereby making society a safe haven for socio-economic and political development.

## Recommendations

In view of the colossal havoc caused by radicalized elements, it is needful to proffer some intervention strategies that would reduce the spread of extremist ideals and their impact on both human and physical development of Nigeria.

- One of the factors that lure many young people into violent extremism is unemployment. In other words; most young ones who enlisted in Boko Haram are either unskilled or uneducated, skilled youngsters in profitable trades or occupations may not join the militant sect on the ground of unemployment; likewise the educated ones who can afford three square meals a day. In this regard, government should pragmatically adopt proactive measures that go beyond political rhetorics to provide jobs and skills acquisition for the young ones. This could begin by ensuring that vocational education is given priority attention, especially at the secondary school level. At the higher education level, entrepreneurship education should be greatly emphasized, and even made compulsory
- Parents have sacred responsibilities to do with regard to their children's life style; they should effectively monitor the activities of their children and the company they keep. Importantly, they should encourage the youngsters to have a clear purpose in life (Van San et al. 2013), especially during their impressionable years.
- The school system at all levels should provide adequate support instead of ignoring or pushing students with extremist ideals to inconspicuous corners. Alienation provides radicalising young ones elbow room to nurture their ideals to maturity, and so become a threat to society. Such situations should not be allowed to exist.
- Government should enact laws that would limit the abuse of freedom of worship by itinerant preachers, whose message incites the people against government and institutions. The law, when enacted, should be stringent so that offenders would be made to face the full wrath of the law.
- The use of indoctrination as a form of teaching should be discouraged, rather the learner should be exposed to pedagogical skills that encourage critical thinking and independent mindedness.

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